

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL MICK BEDNAREK,
DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL FOR OPERATIONS, MULTINATIONAL DIVISION-NORTH VIA
CONFERENCE CALL FROM IRAQ TIME: 9:00 A.M. EDT DATE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2007

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GEN. BEDNAREK: This is General Bednarek from Iraq. How are you?

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Very good,
sir. This is Jack Holt with OSD and the bloggers roundtable. We've got some
folks on the line here. And welcome to the bloggers roundtable this morning,
sir. I believe this is the first time you've been with us, and we appreciate
you taking the time to speak with us.

GEN. BEDNAREK: No, I'm glad our schedules allowed us to do this. We've
been out and about, and it's perfect timing. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Do you have an opening statement for us?
GEN. BEDNAREK: Well, let me perhaps just highlight a couple of things here.
We're getting a little bit of feedback and tyranny of distances, if you will, on
the phone, so I'll try to keep my dialogue going for a few minutes as -- a
couple comments that might help spur a few of your questions or answer some up
front.

I am the deputy commanding general for Operations, so I get out and
about on the battlefield most every day in all of the provinces here in
Multinational Division-North. I've spent most of my time in the last four and a
half months at my third-favorite home down in Baqubah in Diyala province before
we kicked off Arrowhead Ripper in June, followed quickly on its heels by
Lightning Hammer I and II. As everybody may recall, those operations in
Baqubah, specifically in Diyala province, focused on the al Qaeda stronghold
support zone and safe haven targeted directly at that alleged caliphate from
their perspective that they had as a stronghold in Diyala. We followed up that
very successful operation to -- hello?

MR. HOLT: Hello, sir. Yes, sir.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Are you there?

MR. HOLT: Yes.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Okay, good. I thought I heard a disconnect sound.
Followed on that heel by Lightning Hammer I and II, and those division-level
operations were focused principally on continuing our attack based on intel-
driven operations on additional strongholds and areas where we had been able to

track mid- and senior-level al Qaeda leadership across other provinces in Multinational Division-North; big battlespaces, you know, about the size the Pennsylvania, and plenty of sanctuary areas whereby al Qaeda leadership and the Takfiriyyin have been able to hole up until we get requisite combat power, both us and our Iraqi security force counterparts, to go after them.

Those operations in Lightning Hammer II are ongoing, not only in the Upper Diyala River Valley of Diyala province, but also in Salahuddin area and in the Hamrin Mountains in Za'ab triangle up close to Mosul.

So we're focused, we're staying after it, staying offensive as long as we can as we transition in the not too distant future to our next counterparts that will replace us here in Multinational Division- North.

With that, I'll stop, because I want to get more to your questions, as opposed to you-all hearing me yak all day.

Go ahead. Over.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Andrew Lubin, you were first with us. Why don't you get us started?

Q Great. Thank you.

General, Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, sir.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Hello, Andrew. My pleasure. Thanks. Go ahead.

Q Thanks. General, we -- things out of Diyala and Basra seem to be relatively quiet the past couple weeks. But when we were speaking to the PRT leader, Mr. Jones, about two weeks ago, he mentioned that electricity was only two to four hours a day, and it's making his job to try to kind of things economically rebuilt very difficult. Can you tell us what's happening on the essential services up in your area?

GEN. BEDNAREK: Yeah, Andrew, great question. And we struggle with that, quite honestly, every day.

John Jones, the PRT, is spot-on with his assessment. There are areas in Diyala that have very little -- (inaudible) -- and not enough from electrical power generation. There are other areas, also in Diyala -- just one over or two to the left or two to the north -- that would have anywhere from 12 to 16 hours of power every day.

Part of it, unfortunately, depending on who you talk to, walking through the markets, walking through Mujah (sp), Mufrek, Datun (sp) or Barits (sp) and Tahrir, some of those qadhas, in Baqubah specifically, they have pretty good power, but it is not the appropriate output or clean voltage that they need to run some of the larger equipment. As an example, right across from the government center in Baqubah are a lot of vendors that run Xerox machines, generators, et cetera, so people coming out of the government center can Xerox off documents, titles, land grants, et cetera. Well, they need good, clean electricity and appropriate voltage to run that to accomplish their task and business. It's not what is optimum. Certainly, from our perspective, helping

the Iraqis fix infrastructure remains one of the key tasks for the province to work on in the months ahead.

Our assessment, as John Jones perhaps shared with you, Andrew, is ensuring that the province and the mayors of the cities there understand the capacity that they have, get the workers back to the job from a municipalities and essential services perspective, to provide that in the midterm.

Iraqis got plenty of money to fix it, but getting contracts let and skills sets, et cetera, to re-erect electrical towers, get generators back in place, et cetera, will be the key for the future.

Long answer, Andrew, to your question, but it is isolated, in area -- some areas from two to four hours, but much better in other areas. Over.

Q Great. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: And David Dilegge.

Q Good afternoon. Good afternoon, General. Dave Dilegge here, Small Wars Journal. I'm going to ask a standard question that I'm always interested in, and it's really your thoughts on what capabilities would you like to have that you might not have, or -- and/or capabilities that you do have or could use additional -- use more of.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Hey, Dave, that's a great question. And unfortunately, this phone call won't last long enough for me to answer all that.

Being over here for as long as we have and from my sandbox, as the -- (inaudible) -- I get up front and in your face pretty often about capabilities.

Probably first off, because you asked a two-part question there, we have a heck of a lot of capabilities.

And our great Department of Defense, in my view, has matured significantly in getting some of those things into the fight relatively quickly, trying to bust through all the bureaucracy and red tape, so to speak, and turn a -- (audio break) -- relatively quick so we -- (audio break) -- use it out here in -- (audio break). But let me give you a couple areas where, in my assessment, we can do (more ?). And part of it is increased -- (audio break) -- capability to what already exists so we're not making chicken salad out of chicken soup from something that does exist, that gives us more opportunity to defeat our adversary.

And the first would be persistent surveillance. Let me give you a couple examples. Clearly, from the ground force commanders, persistent surveillance and specifically full-motion video is the platform of choice for our tactical ground force commanders. If I've got a platform that I can fly at the safe altitude and give me resolution of what's going on on the ground so I can battle-track and then guide in my forces, whether lethal or non-lethal -- (audio break) -- to achieve what I want to on the ground, that's huge. I've got a lot, I'd like some more, optimally I'd like it 24/7, to allow me and allow all of my commanders to focus -- (audio break) -- intel-drive a maneuver. To me, that would make me a happy camper.

Second thing would -- and similar to that, Dave, is sensors. We have gotten, in my view, with what we have on the ground, to the Ph.D. level of

sensor-shooter, man-to-unmanned aerial platform handoff to achieve lethal effects on the ground, keeping our ground forces and our great attack helos at a great standoff distance to -- (audio break) -- lethal effects on the ground from somebody emplacing an IED on an intersection or a tier 1 hot spot to eliminate them -- (audio break) -- the battlefield. Certainly, I would like more opportunity to do that from a sensor capability, but again, it is -- it is an asset that we do have, it's just growing or increasing that capability at all of my combat outpost patrol -- (audio break) -- et cetera. Again, good -- (audio break) -- what we have, certainly we would like some more.

And the last one I would highlight, and I brought this up to our smart folks a couple months back. And as you know, Dave, I mean, there's a lot of great organizations out there with some deep pockets that are working hard from a technological solution to IEDs. But the bottom line is, there is no panacea. There is not technological solution. And if we think we have one, we've got to go think again, because our adaptive adversary has got -- they just adjust and adapt. And I'll tell you, they can make -- they can make an incredible home-made explosive, out of what would think is pantry, home-cooking type of stuff in somebody's garage, with very devastating effects against our coalition.

But laser technology, with a dedicated and clean power source to where it is significantly small enough yet lethal enough to cut something as simple as a command wire leading from some hidden location to a command-detonated IED, a road, to me kind of seems like that might be something that would be useful. So if I could lead a convoy heading somewhere and having a pinpoint laser along the side of the road to cut a command wire before my lead vehicle on that convoy or that clip gets there, yeah, I would kind of like to test that out.

So again, our great team is always looking to see what else might be available. And our R&D folks and technological smart folks continue to look at those things, based on what we tee up from the foxholes. And again, long, probably too long, of an answer, but I'm passionate about it. Because it keeps us alive, and my great soldiers and all the Marines safe here on the ground, but allows us to perfect ways that we can eliminate our adversaries and keeping our own guys safe as we accomplish the mission. Over.

Q Thank you, General.

MR. HOLT: All right, Christian Lowe with military.com.

Q Good Morning, General, it's Christian Lowe with military.com. I have a, kind of a deeper question for you here. And I want to kind of try and suck you back into Washington politics. I know you're several thousand miles away and you prefer not to.

But what you've accomplished in Baqubah sounds a lot like what the Marines have accomplished in parts of Anbar, like Ramadi. And a lot of critics of the surge say that those kinds of flips, you know, the formation of the Baqubah Guardians and also the Anbar Awakening in Anbar province, were not a result of the surge. They occurred despite the surge, that it was that the U.S. was unable to provide security, so these folks took matters into their own hands to kick al Qaeda out of their own neighborhoods.

To what extent do you think the surge and your efforts there have helped create this movement in Baqubah, specifically in Diyala as well? Or was it just an issue like the critics say, that it was despite the surge?

GEN. BEDNAREK: Great question, and that's an easy answer. I hundred percent disagree. We would not have been able to accomplish our tasks in Arrowhead Ripper, what occurred in Baqubah and the successes from that combat action without the surge -- bottom line, upfront, hands down.

But here's probably again the deeper question -- or the deeper answer to your question is it just -- Arrow gets down to the task and boots on the ground. We have been fighting in Diyala for a long time. In fact, a couple quick war stories to make a long story longer, but we arrived, you know, last August and I would get down, as I do throughout all the provinces. But I would go down to Diyala, and I'd land at Warhorse. And we would go out of Warhorse Forward Operating Base, take a left turn on Victory heading south, go through -- (audio break) -- circle, go down to Mufrek traffic circle, hang a left on Vanessa -- you know, I mean, the standard route so to speak. And I could tell you the specific location where I would perceive sniper fire, I would get hit by an IED, I would get shot at, et cetera, et cetera -- almost predictable on every patrol.

We have and had an entire heavy brigade combat team, heavy brigade with tanks and Bradys, cavalries, infantry, but the bottom line is, just flat: not enough boots on the ground to get out with the population, conduct our patrols and then hold the terrain that we needed to to achieve the desired security effects there in Baqubah. The surge allowed us to provide and put additional combat power on the ground to clear in detail -- and we're talking house to house, street to street, sewer to sewer, utility to utility, block to block not only across the entire city systematically and hold it with the Iraqi security forces that partnered with us.

So again, somewhat of a long answer to your question, but in my view, my opinion, here in Multinational Division-North, particularly for that operation, we would not have been able to achieve it successfully without the additional capacity that the surge provided us in that particular province.

Q And just to follow up real quick, I mean, so are you saying that in a way you kind of tilled the soil for these community groups, like the Baqubah Guardians, to form up and take a stronger stand?

GEN. BEDNAREK: Yeah, that would be -- that would be a way to put it.

Because, you know -- and it's a good comment in a think piece, is that -- concerned local nationals, concerned local groups, the Baqubah Guardians and other areas, they were just flat not strong enough to fight against an adversary; a despicable, horrific enemy that would intimidate families. They would go in to either, A, kill everybody in a house or, B, line all the women and children up and take the head of household or middle-aged males and either kill them right in front of their wives and children or march them all out in backyard or in the courtyard and execute them.

So you have that level of intimidation, and people being able to stand up and fight against that without assistance from Iraqi security forces and coalition forces -- in many cases, it was just too hard. So yeah, it was the seed I would highlight, if you -- tilling the soil is a way to put that, to allow them -- to provide the opportunity for them to hold what has been cleared. Over.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Marvin Hutchens.

Q Thank you, General. If you could, could you tell us a little bit about the experience you've had with the Iraqi security forces thus far through Lightning Hammer II and the role that they're playing and how that might interact with the building of the Sunni and Shi'a reconciliation efforts.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Yeah. Yeah. Hey, Marvin, great, great question with the Iraqi security forces. And you know from your experiences and what you have covered in the Marines, your counterparts there in (Aalam ?), Ar Ramadi, et cetera, although different from a tribal perspective, (in/and ?) reconciliation, Iraqi security forces, army and police, are spotty, to be upfront with you, depending on what province that you're in.

Let me give you, Marvin, a couple examples. In Nineveh province, way up in the north of Multinational Division-North, two full-up Iraqi army divisions, the 2nd and the 3rd, and a 23,000-man provincial police force there across Nineveh province, that -- from an ISF -- Iraqi security force -- perspective, Marvin, Nineveh province clearly is doing the best of our provinces overall in the MND-North -- good leaders, two strong division commanders. The provincial director of police, General Wathiq, is on game and on point for the most part. They are working together. They have run more independent operations than any other province in MND-North -- separate, distinct, planned, executed and followed up without coalition involvement at all. And that's what we're looking for. That's the future. That's the goal. That's the state for where we want the ISF to progress to, from a training and readiness assessment perspective, in the mid- and long term, I mean, because, quite honestly, you know, we're trying to work ourselves out of a job in that regard from a security construct.

In Diyala province, at the southern end of Multinational Division-North, very different -- huge battlespace, 5th Iraqi Army Division, about 12,000 strong; division commanders been on the ground with them about six months. They are woefully short of what they need, not only from a -- people but also the equipment.

Now, let me caveat what I just said. On paper, they are my -- they are the division, as far as assigned strength -- too many ghosts on the roster, so to speak. They are working hard to clean that up, and they're making progress. From an equipment perspective, they are resourced fairly well but still have transportation challenges in trucks, et cetera, from a logistics side of stuff.

The Iraqi police in Diyala province -- again, just about 15,000 boots on the ground, a little over authorizations, but as you highlighted earlier, Marvin, how about helping the reconciliation efforts -- it gets back to trust -- (inaudible) -- the people want to see the Iraqi Security Forces, they want to see their army and their police out in the neighborhoods. Diyala province is huge, and they need more boots on the ground.

In the reconciliation effort, the tribal security forces, as they are being termed, as part of these reconciliation initiatives, are opportunities to provide middle-aged males, the men in the tribes, to become police or army, to stand up in their neighborhoods -- call it neighborhood watch or whatever you want -- to provide that opportunity to secure their neighborhoods and where they live.

It is working. It is getting better. It is going to take a while to get that fully under way to where they are organized and reporting to an (element that ?) will provide them some degree of guidance, if you will, to accomplish the tasks in their specific neighborhood.

Long term, these concerned local/nationals tribal security force, from a reconciliation perspective, we are looking to provide jobs for them into the fundamental security institutions of Iraq, of the country, which are, of course, the army, the police, and the Department of Border Enforcement.

Not everybody will be able to join. Certainly not everybody will be eligible. You vet them, you do the background checks, you go through the biometrics automatic tracking system that you're probably familiar with Marvin, to provide that assurances that those that are joining the force will provide an opportunity to hold those neighborhoods and then continue to grow from a security perspective. Over.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir.

And did somebody else join us? I thought I heard somebody join us late.

Q Jarred Fishman's on.

MR. HOLT: Oh, Jarred. Okay, go ahead. Your question.

Q Thank you. General, could you just talk to -- we're seeing so many positive stories and a lot of progress and momentum coming out of Iraq. But in your area of operations, what do we need to continue to do in your mind to solidify the gains you've already made and to continue the progress?

GEN. BEDNAREK: Great question.

My -- Jarred, my number one push right now is increasing authorization for police from the central government. Let me give you an example. Again back to Diyala province, but all of the provinces are a little bit similar from an -- authorizations. Diyala province right now has authorized a little over 13,000 police. They have requested to grow 21,000. My personal belief, that they could easily use probably another 5,000 over (that ?), but I'm sticking with 21,000 for right now.

So formal memorandums from the Iraqis, from the provincial director of police through the provincial governor, to the Ministry of Interior, through the deputy prime minister through all of the wickets in the central government to formally receive that authorization. And then, once it is approved, the Ministry of Finance providing the -- (audio break) -- to the Ministry of Interior for salaries, for hires, for equipment, for uniforms, weapons, ammunition -- I mean, all of those obvious things (commensurate ?) with a professional organization. And the bottom line is that we have, Jarred, not been able to do that yet. Combination of factors, from bureaucracy and whatever else.

But in my view, answering your question of what is needed, what is yet to have happened in many areas is they've got to institutionalize and approve growth of security so that all of what I mentioned to Marvin a little bit ago -- of growth of concerned local national groups, giving them an opportunity to formally join the legitimate security organizations of the country -- so that

process is allowed. We have told -- you know, "we" the Iraqi government -- have told the people in Multinational Division North in multiple forums, both in Diyala and also in Salahuddin and other areas, that okay, yes, we will approve - - we will approve the growth in the police, but it just has not happened yet.

And there are many things tied to that.

So when you have the tribal reconciliation, tribal security force, et cetera, they are vetted their BATS and they're out there in their neighborhoods trying to keep it safe, providing information, pointing out caches or following up on tips, et cetera, for potential insurgent locations. At some point in time, we've got to bring them into the fold; I mean we got to bring them into the police and the army. We've got to provide them a job; we've got to give them a salary. We want to provide them a uniform, et cetera, et cetera, to be part of the formal institution called security here in Iraq.

I mean, face it, and as you know -- (audio break) -- for an Iraqi man it's all about honor. They need to have an opportunity to provide for their family. I mean, they want the same thing you and I want. They want an opportunity to raise their family, to grow and educate their children, to live in a secure area without the fear of intimidation or reprisal, et cetera, et cetera, and right now that is key, in my view, for the -- (audio break) -- to hold the security gains that we have achieved through a lot of blood, sweat and tears.

Over.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Any follow-on questions?

Q Yes, I have one. General, Andrew Lubin again from ON Point. Sir, to follow your answer and also Christian's question about the surge and how it's working, there's no doubt, really, that the surge is working at a local level in Diyala and Baqubah and your whole AO, but are your gains on the ground followed up by government-of-Iraq action? From everybody we talk to, the weak link seems to be the clear and hold is working fine, but the Iraqi government's dropping the ball in (its own ?) section. Can you comment on your area?

GEN. BEDNAREK: Yeah, Andrew, I can. The answer is they're not moving fast enough. You're exactly right, and I won't sugarcoat it for you -- and in many areas. I mentioned one, which is near and dear to my heart, is the O having to do with authorizations to hire people in the police and the army. It is just flat too slow. But essential services, you know I mentioned upfront food from the Ministry of (Trade ?); getting truckloads of usable grain to the silos to mill for flour to make flour for the people, and then get it out to the food agents and the mukhtars, et cetera. Electricity repair crews. The Ministry of Electricity has got to get more repair crews out to fix infrastructure. Municipalities, water, canal work, pumps that -- (audio break) -- to be replaced, repaired or just yanked out and new ones put in. Canals need to be (dredged ?) in many areas. There's so much junk and crap that are floating in the canals that they clog up the small little locks, and if you've been out there, many of them are manually used and controlled. And you have to go out there with a pipe wrench, if you will, to kind of turn the turnstile to flow the water that allows it to go up and down based on level.

I mean, Diyala province is an example; 70 percent agricultural. You got to have -- water is their life blood, besides the oil, that irrigates their crops, the date palms, et cetera, in the provinces, but many others are exactly the same, even up in Mosul.

So, yeah, bottom line, Andrew, the central government with the ministries -- Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Finance, pick one -- absolutely not moving fast enough. We reinforce it through multiple (forums ?). Lieutenant General Odierno works this extremely hard within his spheres of influence, as does the Multinational Force commander, General Petraeus -- so a lot of people working this extremely hard, working through ministries in Baghdad to assist the provinces in -- (audio break) -- what they need. Over.

Q Appreciate it. A follow-up. Do we have time for -- can I follow up that one, Jack?

MR. HOLT: Yeah, just real quickly. We're about out of time.

Q Okay. General is the government -- but these are Shi'a they're screwing. What -- are they just incompetent in Baghdad? Or do they just not care? I mean, I understand that when they're screwing the Sunnis, but one would think they'd always help out their own.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Yeah. (Chuckles.) It -- there are some absolutely brave and patriotic, smart and dedicated Iraqis in the central government. Clearly, they are some superb individuals working extremely hard. That -- (audio break) -- not the case across the government. Clearly, there are those that would have a sectarian agenda or a personal agenda that is not in concert with the majority.

Difficult to ascertain from my foxhole, anyway, but I would tell you that there are clear indicators in some areas that because -- (inaudible) -- particular sect -- Sunni, Shi'a, Kurdish, Turkoman, Assyrian, what have you -- that an area's going to be disadvantaged because the population is a majority, but not necessarily in line with that particular ministry of the support that it needs. Over.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Thank you very much, Brigadier General Bednarek, the deputy commanding general operations for multinational division north. General, do you have any closing comments for us as we wrap this up?

GEN. BEDNAREK: Yeah, I do. And right front (sic), I apologize for getting long-winded on some of my answers, and I probably went a little bit over in some of my answers. But as I mentioned too, I wanted you -- I'm passionate about what is ongoing, but especially the gains from the heroic blood, sweat, tears and efforts of these great Marines, these great soldiers, airmen, sailors here in Multinational Division-North, but all of the divisions under Multinational Corps-Iraq.

It goes without saying for you gentlemen here on the 'net, but just to highlight for you, I remain in awe, quite honestly, every day, out on patrol with these incredible young patriots. And you kind of ask yourself, you know, where do we get these great American young men and women from all across our

tremendous United States to do what they do, want to part of something larger than themselves, and do it for each other and do it for a country, knowing full well that what they do today ultimately will make our world a little bit better for all of us in the future?

Somebody asked me earlier about, you know, the dialogue and debates, et cetera, on Capitol Hill.

You know, does it have impact for our great soldiers here in the fight? I would tell you that the focus of effort in their foxhole is each other. They fight for their battle buddies. They know that they're making a difference, and they do it thanklessly every day.

But I appreciate your thoughts, your help and your prayers especially in what we do. And all of us look forward to heading home to our loved ones in the not-too-distant future, and I want to thank you for your time. Over.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, General Bednarek, and thank you for taking the time to speak with us. And we really do appreciate it. Thank you once again, sir.

GEN. BEDNAREK: Good night.

END.